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ABSTRACT

College students can read, but they often lack the prereading and postreading skills needed to help them think about and respond to what they read. A three-step plan can help students read and understand the text more fully. The first step entails using measures of fitness to determine: (1) the grade level of the text being considered and how it compares with the level the college has determined is necessary for material to be used in various college curricula, (2) how ready students are to use the text, and (3) the type of responses the teacher can expect from students in discussions about selections in the text. The second step consists of testing one's own (the instructor's) assumptions about how to teach this material against the information gained in the first step to see if they are realistic, and then revising one's goals accordingly. The third step involves accommodating the information found in the first two steps to prepare the student via guided reading. Students learn to scan the preface and table of contents to get the gist of the text and find its organizational framework, then analyze the arrangement of a typical chapter to learn what to expect in their reading assignments. Next, techniques are introduced to help students develop into active readers. These may include vocabulary previews; thought provoking questions that evoke interest in the selection and engage the students in examining their own experiences and beliefs; and various prereading procedures designed to help the student grasp the main points of the story, its setting, character, and tone. (An appendix contains test materials, charts, and a study techniques summary. (RBW)

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PREPARING THE STUDENT TO READ THE TEXT

A presentation at the Annual conference of the South Atlantic Modern Language Association, Atlanta, Georgia, October 29, 1983. Gail B. Kettlewell, Associate Professor Developmental English/Reading, Tidewater Community College, Frederick Campus, Portsmouth, VA 23703, presently of Southern Arkansas University Tech, Camden, AR 71701.

Students have been "being prepared to read the text" since the first grade. After all, basal reading lessons have a carefully delineated plan composed of a pre-reading (preparation) activity, the actual reading of the selection, and post-reading activities. Why then is there a need to consider preparing the college student to read the text? My answer to the question comes from long years of experience teaching in junior high, high school, and community college; of working with high school and college faculties; and from information found in research studies in reading and writing. Our students have the ability to pass placement examinations to permit their entrance into our composition and literature courses, or they have completed the exit requirements of remedial/developmental classes. However, the ability to transfer the learning from reading class, especially from non-fiction into the fiction found in our rhetoric and literature texts is in many cases lacking.

For years, we have said "every teacher a reading teacher" and "every teacher a writing teacher." We have read across the curriculum" as now we "write across the curriculum." And these statements are true if we view our job in whatever course or curriculum area as one which aids the student in the transfer of

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reading skills so that he/she* can better comprehend the material we present.

A common complaint from the divisions at our college is a flat statement: "The students just can't read." My argument is that the students CAN read, but they do not have the pre-reading and/or post-reading skills needed to help them think about and respond to what they read. Today I want to share with you a three-step plan to help your students read and understand the text more fully. Step I is a "goodness of fit" test, Step II is a test of your own assumptions, and Step III is a plan for teaching to accommodate the information found in Steps I and II using guided reading.

Goodness of Fit

In statistics the goodness of fit test is used for one-sample case in a chi-square distribution using the idea that "the test indicates whether or not the observed frequencies are a 'good' fit to the expected frequencies. The fit is good when the observed frequencies are within random fluctuation of the expected frequencies and the computed chi-square value is relatively small, that is, less than the critical value of chi-square for the appropriate degrees of freedom." (Hinkle et al, p. 388). In other words, the expected and observed are similar enough so that the null hypothesis of no difference will not be rejected. The goodness of fit test in our own teaching is one in which we determine how what we observe in student achievement and involvement is similar to our own expectations.

* hereafter using masculine form

There are two tasks in determining goodness of fit. The first is to find the grade level of the text we use or consider using by doing a readability. (See example and chart in Appendix A.) This grade level score is then matched with what the college admissions or testing department has determined is necessary for entrance into the various college-level curricula. For instance, on the CGP (Comparative Guidance and Placement test) a minimum of the 44 percentile, equivalent to a tenth-grade reading level, is required. If your text checks out consistently on a 14th to 16th grade level, the students will need more help in using it than one on the 11th or 12th grade level. The match of text and student entrance level is a general test of fit, but an important one nonetheless. You may believe that you have little control over such matters, and that may be, but it is still worth your time and effort to have this information at hand.

The second type of goodness of fit is a match which can be determined in the classroom. Its purpose is to find out how ready your students are to use the text, both cognitively and affectively. The cognitive test is called a cloze procedure. (See Appendix B.) By the way the students respond to filling in blanks of words which have been omitted in a passage from the text, the instructor gains a score which tells whether or not the text is on the students' instructional or independent reading level. The passage may be selected from the instructional part of the text or from a literature passage as long as it is taken from the early pages of the book.

The other test will acquaint you with the types of responses you can expect from the student in discussions about selections in the text. It is an open-ended incomplete sentences test. (See Appendix C.) The one included in the appendix is used in my reading and composition classes; it gives me a notion of a student's attitudes toward school, learning, home and the future. This affective measure as well as the cognitive measure of closure provide a goodness of fit match of the materials and ability/attitude. A note here about time is necessary, I believe. It takes only a few hours to design these tests, grade them, and consider the results. The time spent at the beginning of the semester or quarter can save much time and anguish later when doubts about the class and the instruction occur. Such information can also be tied to aiding retention of the students.

Assumptions

Step II of this preparation plan is simply to test your own assumptions about teaching with the information you gained in Step I. Harold Herber, in his work on teaching reading in the content areas, suggests that one of the greatest barriers to success for both faculty and students is assumptive teaching. For example, we assume that students can read what we assign, that they are familiar with the concepts of cause/effect, comparison/contract, fact/opinion, time, and space, and that they are capable of making inferences. Further, we expect them to have developed the maturity to deal on several levels with the subject matter. We tend to assume that the student has adequate literal (what the author said), interpretive (what the author

meant by what he said), and applied skills to comprehend our assignments. The test of our assumptions is simply a realistic look at our goals compared with the distance we must travel with the students to either reach those goals or adjust them up or down to something more suitable.

Guided Reading: The Textbook

Step III of the plan provides a method of responding to the students' needs and your goals. It is called guided reading. Its purpose is two-fold: (1) to capitalize on the students' academic preparation, personal experiences, and environment and (2) to capitalize on the organization of the text itself to give you and the students a richer experience.

Very few syllabi begin with a topic such as "Take control of the text," and yet if a student is not in control of the text, the text will take control over him and he will feel doomed and once again become a victim. So first of all, help the students take charge; teach the students to use the text to their advantage. Have them survey, skim, or scan the preface and note to the student. Here they get the gist of the text. Next, look at the table of contents to see its order, organization, and topics covered. Mention in general what, if any, parts you plan to omit. Look for vocabulary, glossary, or an index. Look for all the organizational helps the author has included to help the student take control of the text. In this way, the student is able to form a picture of where the course starts and where it will end. He now has a framework around which to work with the individual assignments for reading and/or writing. What happens

to him is not such a surprise. This preview is the general step called Survey in Francis Robinson's classic SQ3R formula for studying. (See Appendix D.) Now take the survey inside a chapter to see its arrangement. Is there a brief explanation of the short story? Is it followed by questions to ask yourself before reading? Or does it start immediately with an essay followed by other activities? At random, choose another chapter to see its similarity in organization. At this point, state your basic requirements for use of the text. Also corsider what you have accomplished:

1. You have oriented the student to the text in general.
2. You have helped the student see organization -- a pattern to the text.
3. You have shared your comments about the use of the text.
4. You have eliminated much of the surprise and fifth week "I didn't know" problems.

Now match the text with the course syllabus. It begins to make sense and the student has a more realistic notion of the expectations of the course. So much now for general surveys.

Guided Reading: The Selection

What has gone before appears to you probably like a lengthy prelude to the question you arrived with for this session: "How do I prepare the student for tomorrow's assigned selection?" Perhaps it is, but a sound instructional program starts at the beginning with knowing the territory and building from there. Here goes.

There are numerous aids already in texts to prepare the reader. They include vocabulary words, thought provokers, instructional paragraphs on setting, character, plot, theme,

tone, or mood. Our difficulty is often that we lecture on or present those items as students passively watch. If we want our students to become active, involved readers, then we must give them techniques to help them develop into active readers.

Let us consider vocabulary first. Many students are not familiar with the concept of multiple meanings. They glance over the words and quickly say "Oh, I know those" without regard to change in meaning or function. This attitude may cost them. Rather than review an entire list of words with them, though, perhaps it would be reasonable to select a few to discuss in several contexts as a reminder to keep eyes and minds open. The same is true of foot-noted words in a selection from Middle English. Help the students see how letter rearrangement or similarity with Modern English makes the words less peculiar -- again, choose just several words to start the puzzling process so they will refer to the words as they read rather than wait until they have completed the selection and had little notion of meaning.

In their chapter on reading short stories, Adams and Brody also suggest using thought provokers for pre-reading interest. General and topical questions can be used. The authors suggest a list such as the following before reading John Collier's "The Chaser."

1. How does a story differ from an essay?
2. Define true love.
3. Is jealousy a necessary ingredient in love?
4. What are the most important qualities you look for in the person you fall in love with?

(Adams and Brody, p. 302)

Thought provokers engage the students in examining their own experiences and beliefs as they also trigger questions. And it is questions which the students ask themselves that make them active readers. A first question may be "What do these questions have to do with the title of the story?" They can follow the who, what, where, when, and why questions which help fill in the framework for the events of the story.

Up to this point there has been no peek at the story itself. In fact, writers of study skills textbooks will be divided about evenly on this matter. Adams and Brody say not to survey the story itself; just enjoy reading it. So preparation from their point of view involves a vocabulary and thought-provoker preview. Another important aspect, however, is the question "Why should I read the selection?" or "What do you want me to do with it after I read it?" Give the reader the purpose(s) beforehand. You may ask students to read the selection to find out if the author

1. spins a good yarn to entertain.
2. draws a picture of an important era in history.
3. creates characters who are human beings.
4. describes an interesting setting.
5. tries to solve an important human problem.

There are a number of us who go beyond this point in preparing the students. We follow the steps already mentioned, but we also ask the students to preview the text itself to find certain information to provide a framework.

The survey for an essay or non-fiction selection takes the form of reading the first paragraph, the first sentence of each succeeding paragraph, and the last paragraph. What does the student read? In most writing, that includes the introduction,

the main idea of each paragraph, and the conclusion. In fact, the student can make an outline. His critical reading, then, puts all of that together with the details. Of course, the students think that it is cheating to glance ahead, but once they are broken of the habit of reading word-after-word-after-word with no notion of what follows and they see the improvement in their understanding and increase in enjoyment, they are willing to continue such a practice.

The survey for a short story will not follow the essay pattern. The author has a structure, but it would be difficult to expect students to spend time finding that before they read. Instead they survey for proper nouns, numbers, italics, hyphenated words, dashes -- any typographical changes that give special information to the reader. Such a survey can give setting, character, tone, and/or mood thus giving the student more ammunition to want to find out what happened. There are two ways that this can be done.

The first is an exercise in finding proper nouns, and numbers. In an excerpt from Perkinson's A Prodigal Daughter, (See Appendix E.), students made the following list: Pearl, Mercer's, yellow general store, Freewill Baptist Church, "Drink Pepsi Cola," Mama, Daddy, "hello,' Jones' Lake, Pearl, Pearl, Daddy, Daddy, Mama, Nine, two years. Now the questions, "What do you know about the story?" The answer is main characters, setting, and time. Other questions:

1. Does Pearl like her parents? How do you know?
2. Where does Pearl live?

The students then ask other questions to one another. Then, "What else do you want to know?" This type of questioning prepares the students for finding out more about the prodigal daughter -- after, of course, discussing in class a story about a young man (and most of them guess and tell that story in summary) and how she was treated by her Daddy.

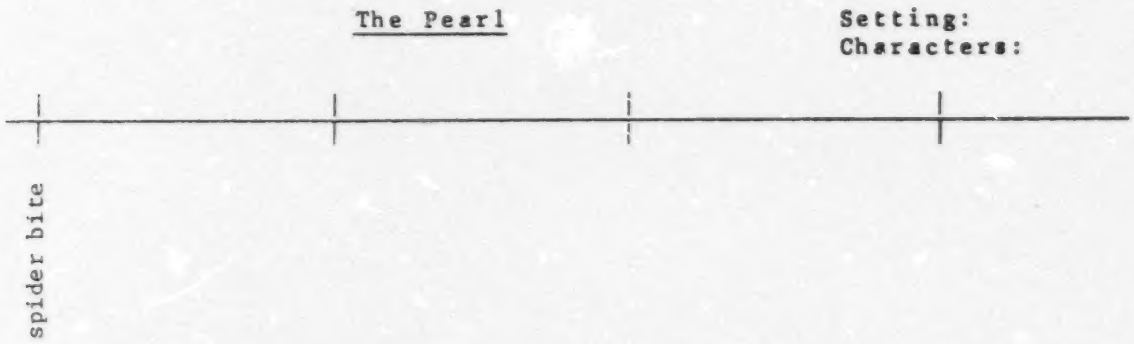
If you are also interested in the language of the story -- if one of the purposes is to hear and see events, then another pre-reading activity is to have the students underline verbs -- not just ordinary verbs but those that help form a picture. The class made this list about Pearl: glimpsed, siphoned, stretched, mellowed, rolled, squawked, skipped, snitched, braked; and these adjective-noun combinations: gabled roof, dirt farmer's house, rutted path, unpainted screen door, scrub trees, loamy earth. (See Appendix E.)

Some students underlined the words as they came to them; others just noted them as we talked. After this part of the exercise students had gathered many pieces of a puzzle. Now they wanted to read the story to see how it all fit together. They had a purpose, and they had information about the setting and characters. Now they read to find out what happened.

A second type of pre-reading activity requires the student to write as he pre-reads the text. An activity from Nicholas and Nicholl's Rhetorical Models encourages the reader to diagram as he gathers information. (See Appendix F.) While this activity works equally well with fiction and non-fiction, the example is from their excellent article on reading the text. The title of

the article is written in a circle in the center of the page. Branching out in different directions are three straight lines, each of which names a major idea about the topic, so the survey gives the title and main ideas just as one done for the novel Chariots of Fire could be divided into events concerning Harold Abrahams' and Eric Liddell's lives. The purpose of the reading activity is to fill in that outline.

Another example is The Pearl. Students skim the text for setting and characters. They list these at the top of their paper. Then they skim to find major events. These they list on a line in order as they occur in the story. The purpose in reading the story is to learn of the details surrounding the events and then to look for the relationships among them.



When the students read a lengthy work with titled chapters, the pre-reading task is even easier because the titles can be turned into questions which supply purpose and interest.

Summary

Preparing the student to read the text involves, then, preparing yourself as in Steps I and II followed by preparing the student in Step III. The students' preparation involves the use

of language and thinking skills. The reader who can and will preview selections does NOT let everything happen to him; he helps it happen. The active reader is the better participator and thus comprehender in the process. In fact, the preparation for reading can be compared with preparation for writing. (See Appendix G.) The preview process for reading uses many of the same skills as the planning process for writing. The active reader is in control of the learning situation, thus becoming an independent learner.

APPENDIX

A Readability

B Cloze Procedure

C Incomplete Sentence Test

D SQ3R Study Technique

E from Kettlewell and Perkinson

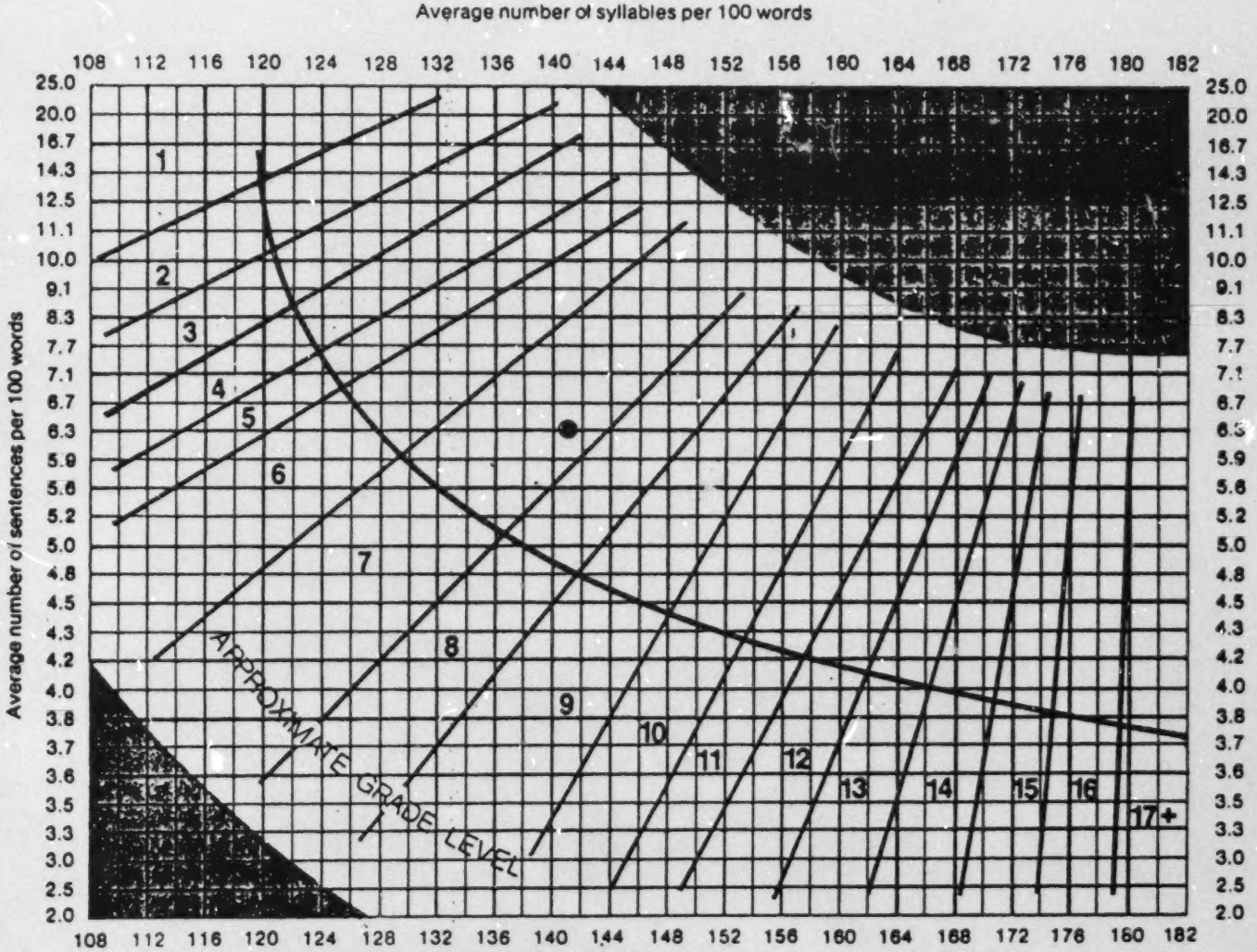
F from Nicholas and Nicholl

G Organizing your Thinking

GRAPH FOR ESTIMATING READABILITY—EXTENDED

A

by Edward Fry, Rutgers University Reading Center, New Brunswick, N.J. 08904



DIRECTIONS: Randomly select 3 one hundred word passages from a book or an article. Plot average number of syllables and average number of sentences per 100 words on graph to determine the grade level of the material. Choose more passages per book if great variability is observed and conclude that the book has uneven readability. Few books will fall in gray area but when they do grade level scores are invalid.

Count proper nouns, numerals and initializations as words. Count a syllable for each symbol. For example, "1945" is 1 word and 4 syllables and "IRA" is 1 word and 3 syllables.

EXAMPLE:

	SYLLABLES	SENTENCES
1st Hundred Words	124	6.6
2nd Hundred Words	141	5.5
3rd Hundred Words	158	6.8
AVERAGE	141	6.3

READABILITY 7th GRADE (see dot plotted on graph)

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For further information and validity data see the Journal of Reading December, 1977.

Tidewater Community College B
10/18/78

CLOZE PROCEDURE TEST

This test is based on the psychological theory of closure: a person wants to complete an uncompleted pattern. Developed by Wilson Taylor in 1953.

Purpose: To determine the suitability of a text for entire class or individuals.

a. gives comprehension score on grade level of text

b. shows student's ability to use context clues

Method: a. Select a 250 word passage at beginning of textbook.

b. Type the passage omitting exactly every 5th word. EXCEPT leave first and last sentences complete.

c. Hand-out copies to each member of group and have student read complete passage silently. Then have him complete every blank with best word he can.

Scoring: a. Count up number of blanks containing exact words.

b. Divide the number of words exactly replaced by the total number of blanks.

(45-50% correct shows book is on student's INSTRUCTIONAL level. 60% or more is on INDEPENDENT reading level.)

c. Multiply above score by 1.67 to determine comprehension of grade level.

NOTE: If grading includes use of context clues, then synonyms may be accepted as correct answers. e.g. doctor/physician

This test has also been used as in indicator of whether or not the student will succeed in this class. Comparison of this score with a student's final grade often shows a close match.

C

Tidewater Community College 10/18/78

Name _____ Class _____ Date _____

INCOMPLETE SENTENCES TEST

1. My favorite subject in college is
2. I sometimes am afraid of
3. I never want to
4. Most of my instructors are
5. Going to college is
6. I hope that I can
7. I think that my life is
8. I like it when my husband/father
9. My favorite person is
10. I get kind of depressed when
11. Doing homework is
12. I think that my brother/sister is
13. Most of all I would like to get
14. My home is usually
15. I get angry when
16. I am unhappy when
17. I hope that my future is
18. Grandparents are
19. My family thinks that I
20. I wonder if
21. My family/spouse feels that my grades are
22. I like to read books about
23. I think that college is

24. I think reading the newspaper is

25. I hope that I will never have to

26. I sometimes get nervous when

27. The easiest thing about college is

28. I am happy when

29. I don't like it when my family/spouse

30. Studying in college is

31. I like it when my wife/mother

32. I would really like to

33. When I get out of college, I hope to

34. I sometimes worry about

35. I think that reading science books is

36. If I could be anything in the world, I would want to be

37. In an English course, I usually like to read about

38. I think the future will be

39. Reading social studies books is

40. My family thinks that reading is

41. Reading math word problems is

42. This college is

This is a revision of the secondary level test from Wilma Miller, Reading Diagnosis Kit, New York: Center of Applied Research in Education, Inc., 1974, pp. 254-6.

The SQ3R Study Technique

The five steps of SQ3R are as follows:

S = Survey

Read the title of the chapter.
Read the introductory statement.
Read all main headings in order.
Study illustrations and read the concluding statement or summary.
Try to recall the outline of the chapter before going on.

Q = Question

Look at the first main heading.
Ask yourself what it means.
Ask yourself questions that you think might be answered in the section.
For example, if the heading is "Formal English," ask yourself questions such as: What is formal English? Do I ever use formal English? When should I use it? What other levels of English are there?

R_1 = Read

Read to find the answers to your questions.
If the answers are not there, you may wish to find them somewhere else.
These are good questions to ask in class or to go to find the answers to in the library.

R_2 = Recite (or Respond)

Recite the answer to yourself to help you remember it.
Ask yourself if the answers given by the author make sense.
Ask yourself if you have a new idea which you can use -- perhaps in a written assignment or in conversation or in performing a task.

R_3 = Review (or Reconstruct)

Review the whole chapter in a 'survey' fashion, but with the details filled in. Then reconstruct the outline in your mind or on a piece of paper.
Try to recall important ideas the author has discussed.
Ask yourself some interpretive level or critical - creative - evaluate level questions.
Try to think of applications of the ideas learned.

* Original technique developed by Francis P. Robinson.
This explanation or discussion excerpted from Reading Strategies for Secondary School Teachers (Burmeister, Lou E.) pp. 84, 85.

Reading Selection E

An excerpt from A Prodigal Daughter, by B. J. Perkinson

Pearl cut across the black, main highway with her old, grey sedan and felt as if she'd left the twentieth century when she swung onto a narrow, tar and gravel, country road. It was just wide enough for a yellow line to split it for two-way traffic. She knew she was almost home as she passed the rural community's twin anchors on the corners of the intersection: on the left, the white clapboard Freewill Baptist Church and on the right, Mercer's yellow general store complete with kerosene pump and "Drink Pepsi Cola" sign. She glimpsed the Sunday men sitting on the benches by the door of the store, drinking their Pepsis as they waited for preaching time.

Her daddy wouldn't be there; he would be waiting for her, at home with Mama and the nine younger brothers and sisters.

\+ + + + + +

the middle of the room. Daddy twirled the built-in lazy susan on the table and winked at her as she snitched a cold biscuit and a piece of salted ham to nibble until dinner.

Popping and bubbling with the cooking, the hot, cast iron stove emitte heat that, today, was more comforting than oppressive. Anyway, the oak trees sent a breeze through the kitchen windows that brushed much of the heat out of the back windows, across the sturdy back porch and past the two tobacco barns guarding the rutted path leading to their fields.

Even though Daddy owned this land, there wasn't much money. He always said that it got lost somewhere on the path between the fields and the barns. When she was little, she used to look for it, but Mama said she wouldn't have known it if she had found it - never having seen enough money to recognize it lying in weeds. Munching her biscuit and ham, Pearl felt secure in this haven. It seemed to her that money just couldn't buy some kinds of comforts.

Kettlewell and Perkinson, pp. 48-50.
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How to Read Better
Joe and his troubles
can't remember
mind wanders
brain comfortable
body comfortable
the moving finger
corrects wandering
forces one to read
some reading rem
initial o
check for
look for pic
locate these s
step one – look it over
do something with it
discuss with a friend
use of outline pages
keep a notebook

Nicholas and Nicholl, p. 10
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Reading

P R R

PREVIEW = look over.

1. Find the plan of the material.

   Read the introduction, main headings or topic sentences, and the conclusion or summary.

2. Look for reading helps: italics, capitals, numbers, dash, ellipsis, parentheses.

3. Ask yourself questions about what the material may cover. Read the study material at the end of the chapter.

READ critically.

1. Mentally try to answer the questions you formed during the preview. Add new questions as you read.

2. Underline important words, make notes in the margin, put * at key places.

RESPOND

1. Take notes, make an outline, write a summary to tie together the material.

2. Discuss it with someone, participate in class discussion, or take a quiz. USE THE INFORMATION YOU HAVE STUDIES.

Kettlewell and Perkinson, p. 173.
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Writing

P W R

PLAN Think about your topic and organize.

1. Decide on your purpose for writing.
2. Make a list of ideas, writing freely.
3. Decide on your audience. (For whom are you writing?)
4. Decide on the method of organization.
5. Make plan or outline to follow.

WRITE

1. Follow the plan.
2. Write a rough draft or first copy of your paper.

RETHINK

by checking your work.

WRITE

1. Make your final copy.
2. Check it for accuracy of organization and mechanics.

RETHINK

by checking your work.

Note: Your RETHINKING mechanism will be engaged during the entire work period. Pay attention to your thoughts when they ask you questions about decisions you have made.

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